

DRAFT COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

USE: Refuge Access for Recreational and Commercial Clamming

REFUGE NAME: Parker River National Wildlife Refuge

ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY: Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. §715d)

REFUGE PURPOSE: "...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." (16 U.S.C. §715d)

MISSION OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM:

To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. (16 U.S.C. §3901(b))

DESCRIPTION OF USE

(a) What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

The Refuge issues special use permits for recreational and commercial clammers with appropriate permits from the towns of Newbury, Rowley, and Ipswich to access clam flats through the Refuge. This is not a priority public use, although it is similar to commercial and recreational fishing.

(b) Where would the use be conducted?

The clam digging would occur in clam flats, many of which are owned by the Refuge. However, in the 1948, the Congress granted regulation of the shellfish industry on Refuge lands to the towns. Most clammers park at subheadquarters, Hellcat parking lot, or one of the clam lots between Lot 5 and Pines Trail, and walk out to the clam flats via the salt marsh.

(c) When would the use be conducted?

This activity occurs year round from sunrise to sunset. However, most recreational clammers conduct this activity during the warmer months.

(d) How would the use be conducted?

Clammers access clam flats through the salt marsh at various points as identified under (b) above. Clams are harvested by hand using a rake. Any clams not taken are placed right side up in the mud and repacked. Commercial clammers may use a sled to assist in transport of clams.

(e) Why is this use being proposed?

This is a historical use on Plum Island, and is related to fishing, a priority public use.

AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES:

The Refuge provides additional small parking lots exclusively for clammers to access clam flats. Administrative and gatehouse staff issue clamming permits when requested. This activity can be supported with existing staff resources.

ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE USE:

The anticipated impacts of this use are minimal, as the number of clammer that accesses the flats through the Refuge is relatively low. In 2004, we issued 40 commercial and 82 recreational clamming permits. There may be some compaction of soil from clammers walking (or pulling a sled) through the salt marsh. Clammers may flush birds that forage, nest, or rest in the salt marsh. Disturbance to wildlife is typically higher when pedestrian use occurs off established trails (Miller *et. al.* 1998). Many of the birds that nest in the salt marsh build well hidden nests among low growing vegetation. Clammers walking through the salt marsh may accidentally step on nest. Following already established trails minimizes this latter impact.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT:

This Compatibility Determination is provided for public comment for a 14-day period, from December 15 to 29, 2004. Availability of the draft CD is advertised through a legal notice in the local newspaper, press release, flyers at the Refuge entrance gate and other public areas, and through the Refuge's web site.

DETERMINATION (check one below):

_____ Use is Not Compatible

__x__ Use is Compatible With the Following Stipulations

STIPULATIONS NECESSARY TO ENSURE COMPATIBILITY:

- Continue permit system to provide information to clammers and monitor use.
- Clam lots were located to minimize disturbance to salt marsh.
- Clammers will be encouraged to follow established trails where available.

LITERATURE CITED:

Miller, S.G., R.L. Knight, and C.K Miller. 1998. Influence of recreational trails on breeding bird communities. *Ecological Applications*. 8(1) 162-169.

Signature – Refuge Manager: _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence – Regional Chief: _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10 – year Reevaluation Date: ____Dec. 31, 2009_____